

AMENDMENTS TO CLAIMS

Please replace the claims with the following:

1. (Currently amended) A method of reducing inflow of rock particles from an earth formation into a wellbore for the production of hydrocarbon fluid, the method comprising creating a zone of reduced compressive stiffness around the wellbore by removing rock material from the wall of the wellbore, wherein the step of removing rock material from the wellbore wall comprises creating a slot in the wellbore wall; wherein the slot is wedge shaped in a cross-sectional plane of the wellbore, and ~~that~~ the width of the slot decreases in a radially outward direction.
2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the rock material is removed from the wellbore wall in an open-hole portion of the wellbore.
3. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of removing rock material from the wellbore wall comprises removing rock material from at least one elongate section of the wellbore wall.
4. (Original) The method of claim 3, wherein each said elongate section has a longitudinal axis extending in axial direction of the wellbore.
5. (Previously presented) The method of claim 3, wherein the earth formation surrounding the wellbore is subjected to stresses including first, second and third principal stresses, and wherein said elongate section extends radially in a direction substantially perpendicular to a selected one of said principal stresses.
6. (Original) The method of claim 5 wherein said elongate section extends radially in a direction substantially perpendicular to the largest one of said principal stresses.

7. (Previously presented) The method of claim 5 wherein the wellbore extends substantially vertically, and wherein said elongate section extends radially in a direction substantially perpendicular to the largest horizontal principal stress.

8. (Previously presented) The method of claim 5 wherein the wellbore extends substantially horizontally, and wherein said elongate section extends radially in a direction substantially perpendicular to the vertical principal stress.

9. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of creating the slot includes

- a) lowering a string provided with a fluid jet cutter into the wellbore;
- b) pumping a fluid through the string so as to induce the fluid jet cutter to eject a fluid jet against the wall of the wellbore thereby creating a cut in the wellbore wall; and
- c) simultaneously with step b, moving the string in axial direction through the wellbore.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the slot substantially extends in axial direction of the wellbore.

11. (Previously presented) The method of claim 2, wherein the step of removing rock material from the wellbore wall comprises removing rock material from at least one elongate section of the wellbore wall.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 4, wherein the earth formation surrounding the wellbore is subjected to stresses including first, second and third principal stresses, and wherein said elongate section extends radially in a direction substantially perpendicular to a selected one of said principal stresses.

13. (Previously presented) The method of claim 6 wherein the wellbore extends substantially vertically, and wherein said elongate section extends radially in a direction substantially perpendicular to the largest horizontal principal stress.

14. (Previously presented) The method of claim 6 wherein the wellbore extends substantially horizontally, and wherein said elongate section extends radially in a direction substantially perpendicular to the vertical principal stress.